

Media release

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Victorian-first family violence trial launched in Geelong



Safe at Home - a Victorian-first trial response to family violence that aims to keep women and children safe at home while preventing homelessness - was launched in Geelong last Friday by the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, The Hon. Natalie Hutchins.

The State Government of Victoria is funding the innovative \$6 million, three-year trial in the Geelong and Barwon region, which is being led by McAuley Community Services for Women in partnership with local community service provider Meli.

Family violence is the largest driver of homelessness for women, children and young people across Australia. Nationally, 61,270 women and 39,753 children were assisted by homelessness services in 2023-24 after fleeing their homes due to family violence.

Developed through years of research and co-design with victim-survivors, frontline workers and men who have previously used violence, Safe at Home is a rapid-response, early-intervention approach that aims to shift the default system of helping women 'escape' violence to providing holistic services to keep them safely at home while disrupting the violence.

Safe at Home aims to achieve long-term system change through:

- Earlier intervention and faster response times
- Flexible, longer-term support for up to two years that responds to changing needs
- A whole-of-household approach through personalised, coordinated responses
- Centrally coordinated access to a range of supports including case management, legal and financial assistance, counselling and practical help like obtaining home security upgrades
- Support for children and young people as separate clients
- Support and accountability for the person using violence, including help to find alternative accommodation where required
- Help to build the household's economic capacity and prevent homelessness

Geelong was selected for the trial because of the high demand for family violence and homelessness support in the region, its suitability for testing a prototype that can then be scaled to other areas, and Meli's expertise in delivering integrated community services for local families.

To contact the Safe at Home team, visit www.safeathome.org.au

Quotes attributable to The Hon. Natalie Hutchins, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence

"For too long, women and children experiencing family violence have had to disrupt their lives and leave their homes to escape violence.

"We're flipping the script and supporting women and children to stay safely connected to their communities, schools and workplaces, by removing the perpetrator from the home and offering tailored support to the whole household."

Quotes attributable to McAuley CEO, Jocelyn Bignold OAM:

"Too many women and children are becoming homeless due to family violence – in the current housing crisis, and with family violence occurring at alarming rates, it's time to think differently and actively change the system to support them to stay safe at home.

"Years of research, collaboration and co-design have gone into Safe at Home, and we are excited to trial this innovative approach to support people in Geelong and shift the default system of women leaving to one where they can stay in their own homes safely and remain connected to their community."

Quotes attributable to Meli Acting CEO, Bernadette McCartney:

"At a time when the housing crisis is impacting heavily on our region and support services including Meli are stretched, the prioritisation of programs that prevent homelessness is vital.

"We look forward to partnering with McAuley to deliver this life changing – and potentially life-saving – program in the Geelong region."

Quotes attributable to Diana Connell, Lived Experience Advisor for Safe at Home:

“I lost my home and my livelihood after fleeing family violence, and for a time I was homeless and living in my car – if Safe at Home had been available to me and my children it would have significantly reduced our trauma, loss and the long-term consequences we continue to experience.

“From my first-hand experience of a partner who was violent and dealing with mental health issues, I believe that Safe at Home’s inclusion of early-intervention, specialist support for the person using violence will help change the trajectory for the whole family.”

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